

turns into a Hitchcockian psychodrama more like *Spellbound*, with Peck in a similar role as an amnesiac living with a false identity. Screenwriter Peter Stone creates an atmosphere somewhere between conspiratorial mystery and paranoia and veteran director Edward Dmytryk plays up the Hitchcockian elements with the glamorous but ambiguous presentation of Baker's Shela, who alternately assists and betrays David. The direction is efficient and Dmytryk teases out the mystery effectively, although he lacks the flair displayed in similar psychological thrillers. Kevin McCarthy, Jack Weston, and George Kennedy costar as co-conspirators. Extras include audio commentary by film historians Howard S. Berger, Steve Mitchell, and Nathaniel Thompson, an interview with Baker, and an animated image gallery. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

Sweet Charity ★★★

Kino Lorber, 2 discs, 151 min., G, Blu-ray: \$39.99

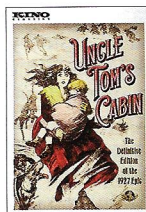


Future Oscar-winning filmmaker Bob Fosse made his feature film directing debut with this big screen version of the Tony-nominated musical that he had developed, directed, and choreographed on Broadway. Shirley MacLaine stars as New York City dance hall hostess Charity Hope Valentine—a romantic in a tawdry business—who never loses her optimism even after her boyfriend steals her money and pushes her into a pond (in the opening scene). John McMartin reprises his Broadway role as a tightly-wound accountant who falls in love with Charity's quirky innocence before discovering her dime-a-dance job (a euphemism for prostitution that goes back to classic Hollywood). The original 1966 stage show was adapted by Neil Simon from Federico Fellini's 1957 film *Nights of Cabiria*, and the songs by Cy Coleman and Dorothy Fields include "If My Friends Could See Me Now," "The Rhythm of Life" (performed by Sammy Davis Jr. as a hipster evangelist), and the dynamic opening number "Big Spender." Chita Rivera and Paula Kelly costar as Charity's roommates and fellow dancers, Ricardo Montalban delivers a low-key comic performance as Italian movie star Vittorio, and Broadway legend Stubby Kaye is the dance hall manager. *Sweet Charity* was a lavish production and expensive flop, but it remains a sweet movie with superb musical numbers and it was nominated for three Academy Awards and a Golden Globe nomination for MacLaine's performance. Bowing on Blu-ray with both the original 151-minute roadshow version of the film and a second disc with a 145-minute version featuring an alternate happy ending, extras include audio commentary by film historian Kat Ellinger, and archival featurettes. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Uncle Tom's Cabin

★★★

Kino Lorber, 112 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99



Filmmaker Harry Pollard's epic 1927 adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's landmark 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was one of the most expensive silent films ever made. James B. Lowe, whose composure, dignity, and gentleness suggest a silent-era Danny Glover, stars as kindly Tom, an enslaved man ripped from his family to pay his master's debt, but the film favors the more sensational melodrama of the married light-skinned couple Eliza and George and their son Harry (all played by white performers), who are split up and sold to the highest bidder. Pollard, a Southerner himself, maintains an uneasy balance between a sentimental portrayal of a happy Dixie with smiling slaves and a land where humans are bought and sold like cattle to wicked, money-grubbing masters. The exaggerated performances and stereotypes have not aged well and Pollard shows a weakness for broad Victorian melodrama, but the film boasts many moving moments and nail-biting sequences, highlighted by Eliza's now-classic harrowing escape across the ice floes as hounds literally nip at her heels. Presented in a new 2K restoration with the original Movietone score by Erno Rapee, the disc also includes the 1958 re-issue edition (introduced and narrated by Raymond Massey), earlier 1910 and 1914 (preserved by the Library of Congress) adaptations of the novel, audio commentary by historian Edward J. Blum, and a booklet. A comprehensive edition of a notable silent classic, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)

The Vanishing Shadow

★★1/2

VCI, 242 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$24.99



Most chapter serials made for theatres during the 1930s and '40s have been long forgotten, including this 1934 Universal effort, which was thought to be lost. Unfortunately, it is not a classic of the genre, but does provide some campy fun courtesy of its primitive special effects, which include a homelier version of the technical tricks James Whale employed in *The Invisible Man* (1933), as well as a hand-held ray gun (reportedly the first to appear in a film), and a particularly unconvincing robot—plus an early electric garage-door opener! The plot, however, is mundane: working together, hero Stanley Stanfield (Onslow Stevens) and scientist Carl Van Dorn (James Durkin) create a belt that makes its wearer invisible—except for his shadow. Stanfield intends to use it to defeat Wade Barnett (Walter Miller), a ruthless businessman who he blames for the

death of his father, a newspaper publisher. Barnett is now employing a gang of thugs to acquire the dead man's stocks and bonds, but what Stanfield doesn't know is that his new girlfriend (Ada Ince) is Barnett's estranged daughter. *The Vanishing Shadow* features typical serial clichés, stilted acting, and rather low production qualities, but the transfer on this 12-episode serial is surprisingly good. Extras include a classic cartoon and newsreels, and a poster/photo gallery. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Wagon Master ★★★1/2

Warner, 86 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$21.99



John Ford's 1950 Western presents a classic Ford theme—the creation of a community in the West—through an often lighthearted tale of a pair of wandering horse traders (Ben Johnson and Harry Carey Jr.) who are hired by a worldly Mormon elder (Ward Bond) to lead his wagon train to the promised land of Utah. Along the way, they pick up a caravan of show people stranded in the desert, who are tentatively embraced by the sheltered Mormon folk, and they come across a vicious outlaw gang on the run—a warped family led by Uncle Shiloh Clegg (Charles Kemper), who hides his ruthlessness under a pose of paternal concern. Joanne Dru is tough and sexy as a showgirl warmed by the welcome and attracted to the strong and silent Johnson, Alan Mowbray is the silky but ultimately honorable snake-oil salesman leader of the gypsy caravan, and Ford regulars Jane Darwell, Russell Simpson, James Arness, Hank Worden, and Francis Ford have supporting roles. Shot on location against the distinctive landscapes of Moab, UT, and Monument Valley, AZ, with folk songs performed by Sons of the Pioneers, this low-key tale of outcasts who face their prejudices and learn to work together against threats by genuinely bad folk is as gentle and warm a film as Ford ever made and was one of the director's personal favorites. Extras include archival commentary by Harry Carey Jr. and historian/filmmaker Peter Bogdanovich (with audio clips of Ford). An underrated classic, this is highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

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